

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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P R 051043Z JAN 78
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8449
INFO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC

S E C R E T HONG KONG 0235

EXDIS

FOR ACTING SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER AND JOHN GILLIGAN FROM
HOLBROOKE, SULLIVAN, AND ROBERTS.

CINCPAC FOR POLAD.

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: EALR, PDIP, EAID, EAGR, SWEL, LA, US
SUBJECT: LAO APPEAL FOR U.S. FOOD AID

REF: VIENTIANE 0017

1. THE LAO NOTE REQUESTING EMERGENCY DROUGHT FOOD AID FROM
THE UNITED STATES PRESENTS US WITH A POLITICAL AND HUMANITARIAN
SITUATION WHICH WE FEEL BECOMES VERY DIFFICULT TO IGNORE. THE
RECENTLY ISSUED UNDP DROUGHT REPORT (BEING SENT SEPTTEL FROM
VIENTIANE) GREATLY REDUCES ANY EARLIER SUSPICIONS THAT THE DIFF-
ICULTIES WERE OVERSTATED AND DID NOT HAVE TO BE SERIOUSLY
ADDRESSED BY PROSPECTIVE DONORS.

2. EMERGENCY AID TO LAOS IS LEGALLY POSSIBLE WITHOUT NEW
CONGRESSIONAL ACTION UNDER OUR DISASTER RELIEF AUTHORITY.
WE RECOGNIZE, HOWEVER, THAT CARE MUST BE TAKEN TO AVOID
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ANY DAMAGING POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS, PARTICULARLY THOSE
WHICH MIGHT RESULT IN THE IMPOSITION OF NEW LEGAL BANS
ON AID TO INDOCHINA. WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND CONSULTATIONS
WITH APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS, INFORMING THEM
OF OUR INTENTION TO RESPOND POSTIVELY THROUGH THE UNDP
(NOT DIRECTLY) WITH A MODES AMOUNT OF FOOD DISASTER
RELIEF FOR LAOS. THIS RECOMMENDATION MUST, OF COURSE,

OBTAIN THE APPROVAL OF THE SECRETARY AND THE PRESIDENT
BEFORE ANY ACTION IS TAKEN.

3. IN THESE CONSULTATIONS WE SHOULD STRESS SEVERAL
POINTS:

A) THE LAO HAVE MADE NO REFERENCES TO "DEBTS" OR
"REPARATIONS" IN REQUESTING OUR ASSISTANCE.

B) THIS WILL BE DISASTER, HUMANITARIAN RELIEF
THROUGH THE UN. THERE ARE NO RPT NO PLANS FOR REGULAR,
BILATERAL AID.

C) THERE ARE NO RPT NO PLANS TO PROVIDE SIMILAR AID
TO VIETNAM.

D) THE PROBLEM IN LAOS IS LARGELY DUE TO NATURAL
CAUSES -- DROUGHT WHICH HAS AFFECTED LAOS NEIGHBORS BUT
TO A LESSER DEGREE. LAOS HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN LESS
ABLE TO MEET ITS OWN FOOD NEEDS THAN ITS NEIGHBORS.

E) THERE IS CONSIDERABLE DEMAND FROM PRIVATE U.S.
ORGANIZATIONS FOR FOOD AID TO LAOS. OUR PROPOSED ACTION
IS A RESPONSE TO THIS PUBLIC INTEREST AS WELL AS TO THE
LAO REQUEST. OTHER FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS ARE ALSO
PROVIDING FOOD RELIEF TO LAOS.

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4. WE SUGGEST THAT ANY HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATIONS BE
ADDRESSED BY POINTING OUT THAT THE EMERGENCY AID WOULD
HELP PEOPLE IN SERIOUS DANGER OF DEPRIVATION, IF NOT
STARVATION. IT MIGHT ALSO BE STRESSED THAT IF INTER-
NATIONAL FOOD AID TO LAOS IS NOT FORTHCOMING, THE RESULT
WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE AN INCREASED FLOW OF REFUGEES
FROM LAOS NEEDING HELP FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

5. IF OUR CONSULTATIONS SHOULD INDICATE SUBSTANTIAL
CONGRESSIONAL OPPOSITION, WE CAN RECONSIDER THE IDEA
OF PROVIDING DISASTER RELIEF TO LAOS. HOWEVER, WE
SHOULD NOT GIVE THOSE WE CONSULT THE IMPRESSION THAT
WE ARE SEEKING THEIR PRIOR APPROVAL.

6. PATT DERIAN CONCURS IN THIS CABLE.
SHOESMITH

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NNN

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